

March 16, 2000

*(Note: These are unedited and uncorrected transcripts)*

COMMISSIONER ABRAMS: I guess we will begin the questioning with Ambassador Seiple.

AMBASSADOR SEIPLE: It must be very difficult to leave homeland and place that you love. You met the need for leadership. I'm sure you're familiar with the issue of "brain drain," and when it leaks, it's a difficult context, to go to another country.

How is the religion going to be preserved if Dalai Lama and others like yourself leave the country? What can you leave it to, whom do you leave it to, who continues to carry on, and is there a strong enough relationship from afar to make sure that the best of Buddhism is maintained in Tibet?

(The following was testified to with the aid of an interpreter.)

RINPOCHE GYATSO: Even before I left, I did consider this issue; but I thought deeply about my Buddhist philosophy whereby you follow your master's teachings. And in this particular case, I had to make this difficult decision to come out because on a very personal issue, on the Panchen Lama, I was not able to agree with the Chinese government. So it did not make sense for me to be staying back, so therefore, I chose this part to come out.

COMMISSIONER ABRAMS: Dr. Al-Marayati.

DR. AL-MARAYATI: I have a question that I wonder if you can shed some light on for us. When it comes to the issue of Tibet and also with Xinjiang and the Uighur Muslims, it seems that the Chinese overriding concern is of sovereignty and separatism. That seems different than some of the policies against religious expression in China itself.

The question: Is there any room to separate these two notions out, to increase religious freedom in Tibet for Tibetan monks without getting into the fear they have of separation?

RINPOCHE GYATSO: I believe that because suspicion that the Chinese government has about the situation people in Tibet, or for that matter Qigong, Chinese see us as trying to use our religious practices for political means; and, therefore, they see that when we use our religious practice, they think that it would be more separatism or even independence for Tibet.

So therefore they suppress the -- they use force to suppress even on religious issues. As I mentioned in my testimony, I believe that China does have good people that are there in leadership. But some among them do not have much knowledge about religious issues or the issues of nationalities; and as they say in China, many of them are swayed by their leftist tendencies. So they go back to the era or to a situation that during the Cultural Revolution of 1958 -- it is this policy that needs to be changed. I believe that they can be separate, but it needs to come from the leadership who needs to change their viewpoint.

COMMISSIONER ABRAMS: Professor.

DR. KAZEMZADEH: Given the tradition of theocracy in Tibet, how could church and state or religion and state be separated? In democratic society, a separation is always made between church and state, but it seems that the Tibetan tradition, the religious leadership is the same as the political leadership. And that is a problem I would like to hear your comments on.

RINPOCHE GYATSO: I believe for the progress of our society, we need to -- it's all but natural that we need to separate our religious practices from the state. However, given the situation in Tibet, there is this tendency, even in my community of Mongol people, there is this tendency of people even looking at their leaders, whether they are religious or political leader, in the similar way. My belief is if we need to change our society, our society needs to progress. We need to follow this part of separation of church and state.

COMMISSIONER ABRAMS: Justice Smith.

JUSTICE SMITH: This is a question that runs through all of our attention. Sir, do you think that attention and interference by a group such as our Commission helps or hinders your cause in Tibet?

RINPOCHE GYATSO: After the cultural revolution, there have been many changes, a little bit of progress, in the Chinese government attitude towards Buddhism, Tibet Buddhism, or Christianity or any other religion. And the one single factor for this change is because of continued international pressure and attention that has been given. Therefore, I believe that international attention does help change the situation in Tibet.

COMMISSIONER ABRAMS: Let me ask a question, two related questions. How much contact are you able to have -- were you able to have inside Tibet with co-religionists, Lamas, Buddhists, in other parts of China? Do you know if there is more or less oppression of them outside of Tibet, in other parts of China?

RINPOCHE GYATSO: For the first -- after 1980 there have been slight relaxation of restrictions which enable, for example, Lamas within the Tibetan areas who interact, have slight interaction, as well as Lamas from outside of Tibet, to foreign countries to come and entertain. That is my answer for the first point.

The biggest problem in terms of interaction with the Lamas in Tibet or from Tibet, or Lamas in Tibet and out of Tibet is the suspicion that the Chinese government has about us using our religious practices for political means. For example, after Cultural Revolution, after 1958, the situation in Tibet was such that many of the Lamas were eventually disappeared. They were dying there and there were no new group of people that continue the Buddhist tradition; whereas in exile by the grace of the Dalai Lama and the opportunities provided by freedom that Tibetan -- fellow Tibetans had, they have been getting good education in terms of Buddhist philosophy. We wanted to take advantage of these people out there, the scholars outside of Tibet, to come and promote Buddhist philosophy; but then the suspicion of the Chinese government is the main problem.

COMMISSIONER ABRAMS: Well, let me thank you very much. I'm sorry.

MR. MCFARLAND: Sir, you are about to be promoted to the Chadel Committee of the Central Committee of the party about the time that you left. Are there presently voices for religious tolerance in the highest echelons of the government, the highest levels of the government? And if so, how can the United States help their cause? How can we support them?

RINPOCHE GYATSO: This is a very difficult question to answer but I see two issues involved in this. First, of course, is that all officials connected with religious practices or policies, whether they are Buddhist or religious practitioners or whether they are officials of overseeing religious activities, they are not only to be able to oversee religious policy, but they are to be totally learned in religious issues. That is not the case right now. Many of them are -- have leftist tendencies, which probably don't have overall understanding of the religion.

Secondly, although China has the constitution, there are many rules in China. Many of these rules are not being implemented; and in terms of religious policy, there is no clear religious policy in China. Therefore, what we have been saying, what at least I, and others that -- they are calling for these two issues, that people who implement religious policy need to understand religion first; and, secondly, they need to be clear of religious policy that needs to be implemented.

COMMISSIONER ABRAMS: Thank you very much. Thank you for being with us today and giving us your statement and for choosing this forum for your public statement about your culture from Tibet and about conditions there. We very much appreciate your being with us today.